

What is happening with Princess Cruises?

That is a common question with people who like to cruise in 2022. Something is different, but it is not clear what that is. They have adopted the Medallion style of cruising and advertise it heavily, but what is really happening? I signed up after the world COVID delay in May 2022 for a Princess cruise around The United Kingdom on the Emerald Princess starting in August. They required that all passengers have vaccine and test negative before boarding. I liked the itinerary and have cruised often enough on Princess to become a Platinum member of their Captain's Circle program.

What was good: The price was \$1200 per person for a 12-day cruise which started and ended in Southampton, England, which was only 1.5 hours away by bus from Heathrow Airport near London. We elected an obstructed view cabin for the discount and the view was actually pretty good. A balcony was considered, but there was a port call almost every day and the weather in August is mostly cool and windy. The ports of call seemed interesting with Guernsey, Cork, Dublin, Belfast, Liverpool, Glasgow, Inverness, Edinburgh, Le Havre, and back to Southampton. The Emerald capacity was 3000 guests and the design the same as the Diamond, Ruby, and Sapphire Princess and similar to Caribbean and Crown. The Medallion opened the stateroom door on approach, could be used to pay for extras, and was required for getting off and on the ship. Risk reduction: We flew the previous day to Heathrow, took the bus to Southampton and stayed in a typical English Guest House. We took a taxi to the dock at 11:30 AM and boarded the ship in 15 minutes. (We were supposed to get a boarding time after 1:30 PM but ignored that request.) The lifeboat drill was from the cabin TV set.

What was bad:

1. The initial sign up was full of details using two separate programs, a Medallion one for your cell phone, and one for your computer. I had a lot of problems trying to get those two programs to work and then responding to their questions. Medallion features require an Internet connection.
2. Princess tried hard to sell you their overpriced drinks package (no value to us).
3. Princess wanted \$200 per person for their onboard Internet package (also no value).
4. Shore excursions seemed much more costly than on previous Princess cruises. In places like Guernsey, Cork, Belfast, Glasgow, and Edinburgh, the best option appeared to get to town using the boat shuttle or local train service, followed by the local hop-on/hop-off bus option. Dublin was so inconvenient that we stayed on ship instead of attempting a visit. We rejected going to the Northwestern-Nebraska football game at the rugby stadium
5. Boat/train shuttle: there were three locations where the ship could not directly dock, and two that required a train to town. That process led to hour+ waits trying to get to/from the city.
6. Food: I was really impressed with the food service and quality on previous Princess cruises. There was just something on this trip that resulted in a large reduction in deliciousness/service.
7. Clientele: There were about 1200 Americans and 1200 British. They all seemed to be somewhat stuffy 60-to-80 year-old married couples. We stood out because of our bright, orange-based attire with matching shirts.
8. Activities: I entered and won the shuffleboard tournament that had only 7 people. The bridge/mahjonn activity was vacant whenever I showed up. I tried to find someone to play ping-pong with, but there was no attendance there either.
9. Shows: The winner was the rock show with sign language from participants. The juggler was good. The rest were uncreative and not worth my time to watch.